

Mission to My Neighbor



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 10:25–37, 2 Tim. 3:16, James 2:17–22, Matt. 22:37–40, Gal. 5:14, Micah 6:6–8.*

Memory Text: “He answered, ‘ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ’ ” (*Luke 10:27, NIV*).

We all know the text: “ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” ’ ” (*Luke 10:27, NIV*). Yet, our love for God can become superficial if we say that we love God but do not obey Him. We think that we love God, but how is this love demonstrated in our day-to-day life? Loving God requires full commitment of our heart, soul, body, and mind—daily. Anyone can say that he or she loves God; doing it, however, requires conscious effort.

However, even though loving God is good and important, God also wants us to love others, because our love for others reflects our love for God, and it does so in a powerful and very real way. First John 4:20 states, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (*NKJV*). Paul also says in Galatians 5:14 that “all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*NKJV*).

This week we will be learning how this lesson can be applied in our lives.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 18.

The Question of Questions

Who are we? Why are we here? What happens when we die? What is our ultimate fate? These are, in many ways, the most important questions mortal beings, beings who know that they are mortal (oysters and chickens are, too, but don't know it), can ask. And in the Gospel of Luke, someone comes to Jesus with what is, in fact, the most crucial question of all.

Read Luke 10:25. What did this lawyer ask, and why did he ask it?

However serious the question itself, the Bible clearly states that he came to test Jesus. We know that sometimes some people may come with skepticism, even unbelief, and may not even be serious in their questioning, but they could still be reached. This is precisely how Jesus dealt with the lawyer, even though He knew that the man's initial intentions were not genuine. Yet, for the lawyer and the audience, this question was an opening that Jesus could use to prompt them to search their own hearts. Even knowing the lawyer's motives, Jesus was not going to ignore him or be disrespectful to him.

In the end, what question could be more important than this one? "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" No matter what our religious rituals or practices, behind them all is this crucial question. In contrast to this one, what else really matters for beings whose lives are depicted as "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (*James 4:14, NKJV*)? For what is the only other option to eternal life than eternal death?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:30–32. What point is Paul making here that underscores the importance of eternal life?

However dubious his motives, the lawyer asked a crucial question, and Jesus, ever watchful to use any and every opportunity for mission, took advantage of it to reach souls.

How can we also be mindful to take advantage of whatever opportunities come our way to witness, even if the circumstances are not ideal?

Jesus' Method and Response

The Bible tells us that the lawyer came to test Jesus, but Jesus knew what his intentions were. Indeed, God knows the longings and desires of our hearts more than we ourselves do. And we certainly do not know the heart or the motives of those who question us, do we?

Sometimes people from other religions question us about our faith. For instance, our Muslim friends ask us questions related to Jesus' divinity, such as, "Where in the Bible did Jesus say that He is God?" or "Why do you say there is one God when you have three persons in the Trinity?" Though these seem to be provocative questions, yet the heartfelt need for Jesus can be genuine and can represent a deep longing or emptiness of those asking the questions. We don't know their hearts; we don't need to. We simply need to minister to others the best we can, regardless of their deepest motives.

Read Matthew 26:56, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 15:3, and 2 Timothy 3:16. How do these verses help us understand Jesus' response to the lawyer in Luke 10:26?

Sometimes we want answers but do not put in the work ourselves to find them. Jesus said: " 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' " (*Luke 10:26, ESV*). Jesus pointed to a very important aspect of learning. Instead of only listening to what others have to tell us, we need to read the Scriptures (the Word of God) for ourselves. The answers already are there, and the Holy Spirit works on our hearts to impress upon us what we need to do.

God has given us His Word. In it, we can find all the truth that we need to know about how we are supposed to live, about how we are supposed to treat others, and about how we can "inherit eternal life." Sure, there is a role for teachers and ministers, but in the end, we must go to the Bible for the truths that matter. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (*Ps. 119:105, NKJV*). This verse is not just poetry; it's sacred truth, pointing us to the Word of God and its importance to the believer.

Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, always pointed people back to the Written Word. What should this tell us about the importance of the Bible and why we must reject any philosophical or theological reasoning that lessens our trust in the Bible?

To Inherit Eternal Life

Read Luke 10:27, 28. What was the lawyer’s answer to his own question?

The lawyer had asked the question, and he himself gave the answer: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . .’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Luke 10:27, NIV).

What was the response of Jesus? He said, “ ‘You have answered rightly’ ” (Luke 10:28, NKJV). Jesus went on to challenge him to do something about it, by saying, “ ‘Do this and you will live’ ” (Luke 10:28, NKJV).

For most believers, giving the right answers about doctrine and faith is not that difficult. The challenge, instead, comes in doing what they know is right and following what they believe. A lot of people who, though knowing enough to be saved, will be lost because they didn’t obey what they knew. That’s how serious this issue is. Just knowing about loving God and your neighbor isn’t enough. You have to do it!

Read James 2:17–22. How do these verses parallel what Jesus said to the lawyer?

If we love God, we will read His Word, we will pray, we will keep His commandments, and we will be obedient to His voice “with all our heart.” If I say I love others, but I don’t care about others in church, or if I ignore the needs of others when I can help, what good is my faith? Christianity is not just a set of distinct beliefs; it is a way of life.

“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:15, 16, NKJV).

How much do you care about the welfare of others? How much do you follow the words of Paul: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4, NKJV)? By God’s grace, how can you learn to care more for others?

Loving Others as We Love Ourselves

Read Matthew 22:37–40. How does what Jesus Himself said here compare to His answer to the lawyer, in Luke 10:27, 28?

According to Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus made it clear that the everyday expression of true belief hangs upon these two commandments. And Luke 10:27, 28 makes it clear that if a person does these two things, then he or she will have eternal life.

“Love is the underlying principle of God’s government in heaven and earth, and it must be the foundation of the Christian’s character. This alone can make and keep him steadfast. This alone can enable him to withstand trial and temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 49.

Read Galatians 5:14; Micah 6:6–8; and 1 John 4:20, 21. How do these verses reinforce what Jesus had told us?

According to Paul, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*Gal. 5:14, NKJV*). For Paul, loving God can be practically seen only when that love is exemplified in how we treat others. Even though he stated that “ ‘the righteous shall live by faith’ ” (*Rom. 1:17, ESV*), yet living by faith is not something that is hidden, unknown or unseen by others. Paul, Micah, and John make it clear that practical works demonstrate the reality of the faith that we claim.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul stated very forcefully that if one claims to have great knowledge or to do great deeds or to have the great faith or even to give up one’s life but does not have love, then that person has become like “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (*1 Cor. 13:1, NKJV*).

Look at the Ellen G. White quote above. Notice what she says about how only in love can people remain steadfast and endure temptation. How does this idea show that the command to love is not salvation by works, but instead, an expression of the faith that we have in Jesus?

The Good Samaritan Story Today

When commending the lawyer for giving the right answer, Jesus said, “Do this and you will live” (*Luke 10:28, NKJV*), and thus, He touched the very core in the man’s heart. Giving all the right answers was easy for the lawyer, but doing those things was an issue 2,000 years ago—and it is still an issue for many of us today. The lawyer wanted to trap Jesus and show off his knowledge. He asked a follow-up question; “Who is my neighbor?” (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*).

Read *Luke 10:30–37*. How would you summarize Jesus’ meaning in the story here?

Are there people around us who have been unjustly treated by others? Have we done whatever we can to help them?

It is true that sometimes pastors, elders, and members do not help those who need help. Sometimes people of another faith may be kinder toward people in the community than we are. We may talk about being kind; yet, others may meet the needs of people that we don’t address. If our faith means anything, we must reach out and help those in need.

Jesus concluded the story of the good Samaritan by asking who among the three was truly a neighbor to the person who needed help.

“Thus the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 503.

Challenge: Begin praying daily for someone who is different from you, or even for someone you may not personally like.

Challenge Up: List at least three names of your acquaintances (non-Adventists); identify their needs (emotional, physical, social), and consider how you can minister personally to those needs. What can you do practically for them in the coming week?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505, in *The Desire of Ages*.

There are many hungry, needy, and mistreated people in our world today. You can do your part, however “small” it might seem to be. We are not going to solve all the world’s problems before Jesus returns. We haven’t been called to do that. But until then, our work can be as basic as helping someone you know who does not have enough food; or it can be helping a member in the church who is facing injustice, even bigotry, which remains a real problem in our world, even today.

“Pure religion and undefiled before the Father is this: ‘To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.’ Good deeds are the fruit that Christ requires us to bear: kind words, deeds of benevolence, of tender regard for the poor, the needy, the afflicted. When hearts sympathize with hearts burdened with discouragement and grief, when the hand dispenses to the needy, when the naked are clothed, the stranger made welcome to a seat in your parlor and a place in your heart, angels are coming very near, and an answering strain is responded to in heaven. Every act of justice, mercy, and benevolence makes melody in heaven. The Father from His throne beholds those who do these acts of mercy, and numbers them with His most precious treasures. ‘And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.’ Every merciful act to the needy, the suffering, is regarded as though done to Jesus. When you succor the poor, sympathize with the afflicted and oppressed, and befriend the orphan, you bring yourselves into a closer relationship to Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 25.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How can we make sure we understand that the command to love God and others is not salvation by works? When we consider who Jesus is, and what He did for us on the cross (see *Phil. 2:5–8*), why is the idea that anything we can do to earn or merit salvation so great an error? How can we learn to distinguish between working for salvation, which is a fatal mistake, and revealing in our lives the salvation that we already have in Jesus?
- ② How can we learn to recognize some of the inherent prejudices we might have toward those who are different from us?
- ③ Other than those passages studied in this week’s lesson, what other scriptural support do you find for the need to show kindness to others, no matter who they are?

Mission Path to Spain: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Luis fell ill shortly after he was baptized and enrolled as a theology student at Venezuelan Adventist University.

At first, he thought it was the flu. But the symptoms worsened, and he struggled to breathe. Physicians suggested that he might be allergic to the pollen from the orange trees that blossomed around the university. He received many injections, but his lungs still wouldn't allow him to breathe. Physicians advised him to quit his studies and return home, but he didn't want to leave. He continued to get tested.

Then a medical test showed that he was infected with HIV. It was a time when people were afraid of HIV in Venezuela. Many thought that they might catch the virus through touch. Luis was asked to leave the seminary.

Luis had no choice but to go home. At home, he underwent additional medical checks. The results were always the same: HIV. Luis couldn't understand why. Hadn't he given his heart to God? Hadn't he been studying to become a pastor? He was very sad.

A church elder noticed his downcast countenance. "You should be joyful," the elder said. "If you aren't joyful, it's because you haven't met Jesus."

The observation struck deep in Luis's heart. He went to his bedroom and knelt down. He prayed to God for forgiveness. He acknowledged that he had not glorified God with his body in his former life and was at fault for contracting HIV. "I don't want You to heal me," he prayed. "I just want to preach for the rest of the days that You grant me."

At that moment, something unusual happened. Luis felt as if his heart started burning, and the heat spread over his whole body. He blacked out.

When Luis got tested once again, the results came back negative. Surprised, he asked to be tested again—and again. Always he was HIV-free.

"Why are you asking for more tests if the results are negative?" the physician asked. "You don't need to be tested anymore."

Making good on his promise to God, Luis dedicated his life to preaching and bringing people to Jesus. He got married and completed his theology studies at the university in 2006.



"I haven't stopped preaching the gospel ever since," he said.

Today, Luis and his family are missionaries in Spain.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that helps support missionaries around the world. Read next week about how a hostage crisis caused Luis to leave Venezuela.

Part I: Overview

Read the parable of the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25–37*) and ponder the following questions:

“ ‘And who is my neighbor?’ ” (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*). Does asking or answering this question from a personal perspective (“who is *my* neighbor?”) change the focus or the priority from the one who needs help to the one who provides it? Does such a shift in focus pose the risk of changing the message and principle that Jesus wants us to understand and practice?

“ ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ ” (*Luke 10:36, NIV*). Jesus’ question focuses on the man who was robbed, his wounds, and his needs. Jesus fixes attention on the person who was robbed and mistreated and for whom help was provided. Jesus also contrasts the neighbors who had the opportunity to help but neglected to do so.

“The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’ ” (*Luke 10:37, NIV*). As Jesus shows, answering the question right is not enough. In His instruction to the expert in the law, Jesus emphasizes the importance of action, of putting the gospel into practice. That is, we must be the hands and feet of the body of Christ.

Part II: Commentary

“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

As we become part of God’s community, we will see the problem of each of its members, and we will experience what it means to live with them and to suffer with them, as well. We can hope that as we suffer with the community, we also will provide for their needs. We must be neighbors to those in need. Many in the community are suffering and in need of help. Can we find out who will need our help as a neighbor? Is my church alleviating the suffering of those in need, or are we contributing to the suffering, either intentionally or through ignorance?

It is worth noting that Jesus’ words, in Matthew 23, were severe, weighted with the truth regarding the situation, and content, of Israel’s religiosity. Jesus’ words also were aimed toward the restoration of His people so that His people could be compassionate neighbors. Jesus wanted His people to understand His law in a new way. He wanted Israel to focus on God and on their neighbor, as well. Jesus’ intention was that Israel should “ ‘love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind’ ” (*Matt. 22:37, NIV*). This precept is the first and

greatest commandment. But the second commandment is an extension of the first: “ ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*Matt. 22:39, NIV*). Fairness and justice, love and care, cannot be practiced by individuals only; they also need to be practiced and implemented by the church, the body of Christ.

Old Testament Prophets as Defenders of the Neighbor

The prophets of the Old Testament were quite outspoken regarding the laws and regulations dealing with one’s neighbor or with those who needed healing and salvation. Such laws and regulations, spoken through the prophets, were God’s way of communicating His will for Israel to witness to its neighbors, to be a light to the nations. The prophets were to serve as heralds of the gospel and to be spokespersons against all injustices and evil.

The prophets urged the people and their leaders to “seek justice, defend the oppressed. Take up the the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (*Isa. 1:17, NIV*) and forbade the oppression of “the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor” (*Zech. 7:10, NKJV*). The prophets also were fierce in their condemnation of all injustice. Elijah rebuked King Ahab for murdering Naboth and stealing his vineyard. Amos fulminated against the rulers of Israel because, in return for bribes, they trampled on the heads of the poor, crushed the needy, and denied justice to the oppressed, instead of letting “justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream.”—John R. W. Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990), p. 236.

The structure and society of Israel “exalted labor, denounced idleness, expected fathers to train their sons to acquire skills with their hands, furthered human reciprocity, and justice, and demonstrated an active concern for one’s neighbors,” and, notably, “it respected the dignity of both men and women, the bearers of the divine image.”—Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 88. Moreover, worship and obedience to God are directly related to justice and philanthropy. These sets go hand in hand, just as justice and mercy to one’s neighbor are related to walking humbly before God. All instructions and regulations for the well-being and fair treatment of the poor, alien, orphan, widow, and vulnerable have their origins in God, the One who cares for His children and shows compassion and mercy to whomsoever needs Him. In an echo of the biblical message, one writer sums up in this way the gospel directive to care for the poor: “to speak about poverty is to touch the Heart of God.”—William Robert Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God: The Social Construction of Poverty*

Among Biblical Peasants (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), p. 8.

Oftentimes a question is asked: How can my neighbor, who is often the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed, be helped to secure the blessings of God's providence and to live the life Jesus intended humans to live? Here is a statement from Ellen G. White that provides light on the subject:

"If men would give more heed to the teaching of God's Word, they would find a solution of these problems that perplex them. Much might be learned from the Old Testament in regard to the labor question and the relief of the poor.

"In God's plan for Israel every family had a home on the land, with sufficient ground for tilling. Thus were provided both the means and the incentive for a useful, industrious, and self-supporting life. And no devising of men has ever improved upon that plan. To the world's departure from it is owing, to a large degree, the poverty and wretchedness that exist today."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 183, 184.

The lessons and instructions of the Bible help us to understand the intention of God regarding the needy neighbor. God wants us to be in connection with His Word so that we can be His instruments of mercy and love to those who are suffering and in need of hope. Moreover, "it is God's purpose that the rich and the poor shall be closely bound together by the ties of sympathy and helpfulness."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 193. This togetherness will prove to be a blessing to both groups. It will help the poor, as well as the rich, in understanding God's plan of salvation and will establish the fact that a life of benevolence will reveal spiritual truths than can be understood only amid distress and suffering.

Only by our love and service for our neighbor who needs help can we prove the genuineness of our love for Christ. True mission service comes from our true love for our Savior, a sentiment that reinforces the notion that *being* is oftentimes more important than *giving* or just *doing* good deeds for the needy or the poor. "The message of the Old Testament is a call to an ethical lifestyle modeled in what God has done for us in Christ. It has to do with following God's principles through living a life of witnessing to, helping, and loving the neighbor and those in need as yourself."—Jiří Moskala, "The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, nos. 1–2 (2008): p. 58.

The Life and Mission of Jesus

The ministry of compassion manifested in the life and ministry of Jesus was the best possible example provided for the disciples, apostles, followers, and new believers of the early apostolic church. Jesus (Immanuel) dwelt among men and women to restore and save, to heal and forgive, with

a love that was even stronger than death itself. His special attention toward the neighbor, the other—which included the needy, the poor, the sick, the demon-possessed, the foreigner, and many others—caused the Son of God to devote a large portion of His time and energy to healing and caring for them all during His earthly ministry.

Jesus' teachings were always confirmed by His actions, and His ministry of healing (salvation) affirmed what He preached. His was a ministry of restoration, which made human beings wholesome in body, spirit, and mind. Jesus came to reveal God's character to the fallen human race, and by doing so, He made possible the restoration of the image of God in His creatures.

When the needs of both church members and nonmembers are met, when we become neighbors to the poor and attend to their needs, when we see the hungry and thirsty and feed them, when we clothe the naked and visit the imprisoned, then the members of the body of Christ have true fellowship with God and with one another. This fellowship demonstrates that we are no longer selfish but can share together and live out a life that testifies to a true and pure religion and life, the life of Christ.

The apostle Paul encouraged mission to the neighbor by urging church members to do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (*Gal. 6:10*). But Paul also had a broader view of this mission of compassion to the neighbor, who included even our enemies: “ ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink’ ” (*Rom. 12:20, NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

How can the whole gospel of Jesus Christ—a gospel that is able to heal and to save, to protect and to restore—transform our neighbors into heirs of God's kingdom? We believe that this transformation is work, or ministry, that must be done through the power of God's Spirit, in order that many persons might receive the graces of Christ's gospel and be transformed into His likeness for the benefit of families, communities, and nations for the glory of God. What a difference it would make if we would all be intentionally committed to this ministry.

Most important, who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does this question mean in practical terms?

“Real charity helps men to help themselves. If one comes to our door and asks for food, we should not turn him away hungry; his poverty may be the result of misfortune. But true beneficence means more than mere gifts. It means a genuine interest in the welfare of others. We should seek to understand the needs of the poor and distressed, and to give them the help that will

benefit them most. To give thought and time and personal effort costs far more than merely to give money. But it is the truest charity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 195.

Notes
